Chapter 9 - Prosocial Behavior

Objectives

1) An exploration of the bases of prosocial behaviour

2) An examination of the effects of personality, gender, religion, culture, and other variables on prosocial behavior

3) A study of reasons why some people help in an emergency situation while others do not.

4) An evaluation of the nature of heroism and the traits of heroes.

5) A consideration of the measures by which prosocial behaviour might be encouraged

Chapter 9 Overall Outline

Prosocial Behaviour
• Definition of terms
• Questions to ponder
• 5 Bases of helping behaviour

Factors that influence Prosocial Behaviour
• Cultural Differences
• Personality Variables
• Gender Differences
• Effects of Religion
• Rural-urban differences

Bystander Intervention
• Factors influencing bystander intervention
• Latane-Darley Model
• The beneficiary: Who gets helped?
• Heroism
Outline Part 1

ProSocial Behavior

- Definition of Terms
- Questions to ponder
- Bases of Helping Behavior

Definition of Terms

What are prosocial behaviour and altruism?

- Terms are used interchangeable
- describe actions that are voluntarily carried out
- no expectation of reward
- theologians and philosophers traditionally defined altruism as behaviour intended to help others
- without expectation of external reward or self-reward
Questions to Ponder

• Why do some people help others for apparently no rewards? (i.e. prosocial behaviour and altruism)

• Why do people refuse to help others even in situations that clearly warrant help (i.e. the bystander effect)

5 Bases of Helping Behaviour

1) “Born Saints” - Prosocial behaviour as an inborn tendency

2) “It’s what’s expected” - Prosocial behaviour and social norms

3) “A good upbringing” - Prosocial behaviour and learning

4) “Feeling good about yourself” - Prosocial behaviour and mood

5) “Other people’s shoes” - Prosocial behaviour and empathy
1) “Born Saints”: Prosocial Behaviour as an inborn tendency

- some theorists argue that natural selection favours the genetic transmission of factors that predispose an organism to act prosocially towards other members of its species

- Darwin (1872) in Descent of Man posited:

  “As a man is a social animal (yes, even including Darwin’s man in terror) it is almost certain that he would form an inherited tendency to be willing to defend, in concert with others, his fellow man; and be ready to aid them in any way which did not too greatly interfere with his own strong desires.”

The evidence:

- some studies (Rice & Gainer, 1962), showed that rats would press a bar more often if their action lowered a struggling rat suspended in air than if it lowered a suspended piece of foam block

- however, in another study (Lavery & Foley, 1963), it was found that rats learned to terminate either a rat’s squeals or a loud noise;

  this implies that they may have lowered the squealing rats to stop the noise (arousal reduction) not to free them (altruism)

- cases of dolphins lifting swimmers to safety

- Complicated? We have problems trying to decipher motives in humans, and we can talk!
Overall:

• contention that prosocial behaviour has a genetic basis still lacks empirical verification

• more likely that aspects of personality are genetically determined, and personality is related to prosocial behaviour

2) “It’s what’s expected”:
Prosocial behaviour and norms

several norms are relevant to prosocial behaviour

1) Norm of reciprocity = universal norm, requires that people help, and not harm, those who have helped them in the past

2) Norm of social responsibility = prescribes that people should help others who might need help, regardless of whether the potential benefactors might reciprocate in the future

3) Norms of equity = specifies that fairness should serve as a criterion for the way we treat others
3) “A good upbringing”: Prosocial behaviour and learning/development

- many studies have shown that prosocial behaviour increases steadily up into the age of 10

- What accounts for the development of prosocial behaviour?

**Cognitive-Development theory**

- People help other people because of a personal set of values and attitudes that obligate them to provide assistance in certain situations;

- moreover, personal morality (as described by Piaget and then later by Kohlberg) develops gradually as child realizes that adults’ rules are somewhat arbitrary

**Social Learning Approach**

- emphasizes the acquisition of altruistic behaviour, and takes for granted that prosocial behavior is learned...

- ...through reinforcement, self-attributions, modelling, and parental discipline

**Modelling evidence**

- a number of studies have shown that children’s responses to charitable models are durable and can be generalized

Midlarsky and Bryan (1972)

- found that children observing an adult donate to a charity positively influenced the children’s own donations 10 days later, even when the setting and experimenter differed
4) “Feeling good about yourself”: Prosocial Behaviour and Mood

- evidence supports the notion that positive mood facilitates individual acts of charity or helping, while bad moods impede such behaviour

- several studies have shown that subjects who are asked to reminisce about happy experiences gave more money to charity than those asked to reminisce about sad experiences

Why?
A) cognitive processing capacity
- Easterbrook (1959) suggested that being in a good mood may increase our ability to notice what is going on around us and thereby allow us to respond appropriately;
- while bad moods limit our ability to turn our attention to other people

B) The warm glow of success (Isen, 1970)

Design: 3 groups
Group 1 experienced success
Group 2 experienced failure
Group 3 no feedback

- observed to see if subjects from each group would help confederate who dropped books

Findings:
- subjects who experienced success were more often helpful than subjects in the other two groups

Conclusion:
- positive mood engendered by success predisposes the individual toward events that will engender more good feelings
5) “Other people’s shoes”: Prosocial Behaviour and Empathy

- Empathy = a vicarious emotional response (a feeling) elicited by and congruent with the perceived emotional state of another person

- Empathy has also been defined in cognitive terms, as the ability to detect accurately what another person is feeling, and to see things from the other person’s perspective

The development of empathy

- Studies by Eisenberg

- Age of onset

Outline part 2

Other Factors that influence Prosocial Behaviour

- Cultural Differences

- Personality Variables

- Gender Differences

- Effects of Religion

- Rural-urban differences
Cultural Differences

• Altruism is expressed differently between individualistic and collectivistic societies

• Children in the U.S. least likely to provide assistance compared with children in India, Kenya, Mexico, and Japan

• Overall, prosocial behaviour is most evident among children whose culture requires it (e.g. where families are large and children help care for siblings and manage the household)

Personality Variables

• Appears to be personality differences in terms of prosocial behaviour

• Subjects who help have been found to be more socially oriented and more internal in terms of locus-of-control than subjects who do not help

• Some have argued that there is an “altruistic personality” which is associated with higher internalized standards of justice and responsibility and greater empathy, self-control, and integrity
Gender Differences

- Appear to be differences in empathy between genders
- women have been found to experience more vicarious affective responses than men,
- perhaps because men have traditionally been trained to suppress emotional displays, we might expect women to be more empathic
- However, empirical studies conducted on gender differences are mixed

Effects of Religion

- Research suggests that while individuals who believe that helping others is a religious duty are more likely to volunteer help,
- simply being “religious” in itself does not correlate well with helping behaviour or compassion for those in need

Rural - Urban differences

- Overall, people living in urban environments are less likely to help than those in rural communities

Reasons:
- urban persons cannot help everyone
- intensity of urban stimuli (e.g. noise)
- greater diversity in urban environments (i.e. less likely to help people in unfamiliar groups)
Bystander Intervention

• much of the research in altruism has been focused on the bystander problem: the reluctance of people to help in emergencies when other bystanders are present

• the bystander effect occurs in situations where there is ambiguity about whether an emergency actually exists

• When we observe that others are not responding, we tend to misinterpret the situation and assume there is no real emergency to respond to

• However, when the situation is clearly an emergency, the presence of bystanders does NOT tend to inhibit intervention

• The type of help offered will depend on how the person perceives the rewards and costs involved in various alternative actions
Factors influencing Bystander Intervention

• Social Norms

• Ambiguity of the Situation

• Diffusion of responsibility

• Rewards and Costs

The Latane-Darley model of Bystander Intervention

1) The bystander must notice that something is happening

2) The bystander must interpret the situation as an emergency

3) The bystander must decide whether or not he or she has a responsibility to intervene

4) The bystander must decide in what way he or she can best be of assistance

5) The bystander must choose how best to carry out this course of action
The Beneficiary

• Who gets helped?

• Not only are some people more likely to help than others, but some people in need are more likely to be helped

Factors influencing who gets helped:

• physical attractiveness

• degree of apparent need

• perceived similarity between the requester and the helper

Heroism

• When the risks to the helper are great, heroic actions may occur, which appear to be related to a strong sense of adventurousness, social marginality and strong identification with moral values and conduct of a parent

Heroism and Gender

• Appears that men are more likely to intervene than women